

Chicago Lawn

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The latest census data from 2000 shows that the population of Chicago Lawn is about 61,412 people. Chicago Lawn in Chicagoland extends from Belt Avenue on the east, Central Park on the west, to 59th Street on the south, to 75th Street.

In 1855, a man named John Frederick Eberhart came to Illinois from the state of Pennsylvania. In 1859, Eberhart who was then twenty-nine years old became the first Cook County Superintendent of Schools. He traveled to schools by horses along very rough roads. In 1871, when Eberhart's term for superintendent expired, he decided to purchase some land, which now extends from 63rd to 67th street, and from Kedzie to Central Park. He paid \$1.25 for an acre of land. With his new land, he hoped to create a prosperous community. He was also able to convince a friend, James Webb, to buy land from 63rd and 59th street, and from Kedzie to Central Park. The two land purchases became the original Chicago Lawn.

After buying the land, Eberhart realized that to make his community successful, he needed a means of transportation. Eberhart decided to get the city of Chicago to build a railroad through his new land. He paid \$5000 for the railroad to be created. This railroad attracted many settlers. After the railroad was built, the community officially became known as Chicago Lawn, although many of its residents preferred "The Lawn." In 1876, Eberhart created the first building of Chicago Lawn, the railroad depot on 63rd and Central Park. The railroad would soon become an important source of bringing supplies

to Chicago Lawn. Soon after, he created a real estate office. He later built all the original homes of Chicago Lawn, as well as his own house on 64th street. In 1892, Amos Cravener's Grocery Store was created on 63rd and Central Park. The store consisted of a meat market as well as the grocery store. Then five pounds of jelly was 13 cents, twenty pounds of cornmeal was a quarter, and soap was a nickel.

The Marquette Manor, the area that surrounds Marquette Park, was later created; after World War I, the Marquette Manor would merge with Chicago Lawn to form one community of Chicago Lawn. Many Lithuanian immigrants came to Marquette Manor, and they still do today.

In 1888, a volunteer fire department was formed in Chicago Lawn. The Station was on 62nd and St. Louis. The only water for the firemen to use was well water, or ditch water, and the only engine they had was a horse pushcart. Luckily the only fires that needed to be put out were prairie fires. In 1898, a horse trolley service was created, a pleasant addition to the community.

In 1889, the residents of Chicago Lawn voted to become part of the city of Chicago. Doing this allowed them to get services from the city. The first city water came in 1898. This was enough for a parade. Parades were very popular in Chicago Lawn, for almost any occasion. In 1909, the first library came to Chicago Lawn. The library consisted of about 1,200 books donated by the downtown library. In 1902, the first telephone service came to Chicago Lawn. People paid \$1.50 per month for service. Eventually 63rd street became a large retail street. In 1908, a shoemaker came to Chicago Lawn and created his Shoe Repair Shop on 63rd and Homan. The Lawn Theater was located at 3419 W. 63rd Street, which was the first theater in Chicago Lawn. It has since been destroyed.

When houses and retail businesses started to appear in the 1920s in Chicago Lawn, so did the immigrants. They were mostly Polish and Lithuanian, who saw Chicago Lawn's job opportunities as a reason to settle there.

Marquette Park had such activities as ice skating and tobogganing in its early days. In 1913, the park opened a large golf course. Marquette Park also consists of 3 1/2 miles of lagoon for fishing.

After World War I, Chicago Lawn grew considerably. By 1925, a "million-dollar" show house was built on 59th and Kedzie. It was called The Colony and could seat 2,500 people. It still stands, abandoned after closing some years ago. Opening in January 1931, was Marzano's Million Dollar Palace of Pleasure bowling alley. It stretched from 3315 to 3331 on 63rd St. Since then, it has been torn down, and moved with the name Marzano's Miami Bowl. Gertie's Ice Cream Parlor was a popular place to go. Built next to the Colony, it got a large amount of business. Within the past year, a telephone company has taken over the building. "Yankee Doodle Dandy," a popular burger bar was down the street from Gertie's. In the 1980s it closed and was replaced by another restaurant. In 1941 Nabisco opened a plant near the southern border of Chicago Lawn.

Throughout Chicago Lawn's history, many churches have been built. Some of them being St. Elizabeth Episcopal, St. Nicholas of Tolentine, and St. Rita Church. Many schools have also been built. There are currently nine high schools in Chicago Lawn. From 1966 to 1988, many civil rights marches occurred in Marquette Manor. Often civil rights groups would confront American Nazi marches.

About 1987, many Mexican immigrants started to settle in Chicago Lawn. They found the employment opportunities attractive, as well as the slightly lower housing costs

than surrounding neighborhoods (with most houses priced \$91,000). In 1990 the census records 28 percent of Chicago Lawn residents to be Hispanic. By 2000 over 35 percent is Hispanic. That is equal to 21,534 people as opposed to the 6,190 white (non Hispanic) people. Unlike many communities in Chicago, most billboards and stores are in Spanish. There is also a growing number of Blacks in Chicago Lawn.

The community of Chicago Lawn started off as a large amount of land with a train and a few houses, but has since grown to be a diverse community of hardworking people.

[From: Kathleen J. Headly, *Chicago Lawn/ Marquette Manor*; Student historian's interview with Mary Ann Droel (Chicago Lawn resident), Dec. 27, 2002; Website: Chicago Tribune, www.chicagotribune.com (access date Jan. 5, 2003).]